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AUTHOR Blanco, George M.
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ABSTRACT

A diagnostic Spanish proficiency exam for a bilingual education teacher preparation program was pilot tested with 38 students, both native and non-native speakers. Other standardized proficiency exams were considered but judged inappropriate. The Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Test: Spanish seemed more useful for Spanish literature majors because of its literary orientation and use of peninsular dialect. The College Board's Spanish Proficiency Exam assesses only a passive knowledge of Spanish listening comprehension and reading. Accordingly, a test was developed specifically for the teacher preparation program. Its purposes were (1) to objectively assess listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; (2) to assess phonological, grammatical, and lexical items; (3) to recommend remedial courses, if necessary; (4) to document linguistic growth; and (5) to make this assessment in a relatively reasonable period of time. The locally popular Northern Mexican dialect was used in preference to the peninsular dialect. The test consisted of a conversational oral interview and four other subtests--speaking, listening comprehension, reading, and writing. Results of the pilot testing indicated a positive correlation between proficiency ratings on the interview and the speaking and listening comprehension scores. Native speakers' ratings on the interview correlated positively with every subtest except reading; however, non-native speakers showed no clear correlation trends. The test is being modified to reduce administration time from four to two hours. (CP)

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Oral Language Assessment of the Linguistically Distinct:
Techniques and Problems in Research and Development
(Symposium, Division H)

SPANISH-LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT IN A BILINGUAL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

George M. Blanco

The University of Texas at Austin

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The degree of proficiency in one or two languages is an issue which is central to bilingual education in the United States today. Bilingual education revolves around those representatives of our student population whose native language is other than English and who have a limited command of English, if any at all. In terms of elementary school children in a bilingual education program, the rationale of the program is based on the premise that the pupils' intellectual development should not be delayed or hampered because their knowledge of English is limited. Teacher preparation institutions have been charged with the responsibility of producing personnel capable of carrying out the elementary instructional program in two languages. Indeed, the question of proficiency on the part of the teacher, in the child's home language, is of great importance to the success or failure of a bilingual education program. The ESEA Title VII Guidelines for Bilingual Education Fellowships, for example, judge institutions of higher education by their "... ability to prepare teachers to teach various subjects or courses of study in elementary or secondary schools using English and a language other than English as the media of instruction."[1]

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The Center for Applied Linguistics in its publication, Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Bilingual-Bicultural Education, makes the following statement as its first recommendation:

> The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:
>
> 1. Communicate effectively, both in speaking and understanding, in the languages and within the cultures of both the home and school. The ability will include adequate control of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and regional, stylistic, and nonverbal variants appropriate to the communication context.
>
> 2. Carry out instruction in all areas of the curriculum using a standard variety of both languages.[2]

Since language proficiency is an indispensable skill for the bilingual education teacher, it would appear that a teacher preparation program should devote a large part of its resources toward further developing and imporving the future teachers' command of the target languages. At this point in the evolution of the bilingual education movement, however, the concern of the profession in terms of language proficiency largely focuses on the home language of the child, rather than the English language. For bilingual education teachers who were born and educated in the United States, it is usually a foregone conclusion that they have adequate control of the English language. Even for teachers who are native speakers of a non-English language, the greatest part of their education and their experiences outside of the home have been via the English language. The non-English language has usually been reserved for the intimacy of the family and friends. While there is usually no question about the language dominance of

teacher candidates, particularly in some of the technical domains such as education, the teacher-preparation program must practice what it preaches. Teacher educators must know where the future teachers are before they can meet their needs. It is this notion of attempting to find out where the future teachers are in terms of the non-English language that I would like to address today. My remarks will deal specifically with the Spanish language and the language-proficiency test developed at UT Austin, but the ideas can be applied to other language groups as well.

When the bilingual education teacher preparation program was established at UT Austin, the students were required to take the Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Test: Spanish[3] to indicate their level of proficiency in this language. While the test has many good features and includes sections on listening, speaking, reading and writing, the disadvantages were too great. It was apparent that the reading passages were too literary in nature and the overall language had a definite Peninsular orientation. The test seemed more appropriate for a major in Spanish literature rather than for a future bilingual education teacher. After deciding not to use the MLA Test, we were left with the responsibility of trying to assess each new student's Spanish-language proficiency with some other means. The CEEB Spanish Proficiency Exam[4] was given due consideration, but is was not used because it only assesses a passive knowledge of Spanish listening comprehension and reading. The obvious solution was an oral interview with

each student and a written composition on an assigned topic. This procedure seemed to work well, but it too had definite disadvantages:

1. It was too time-consuming.
2. It lacked a framework which would yield an objective evaluation.
3. It did not provide sufficient information for proper student advising.

Our purpose in developing an instrument to assess the Spanish-language proficiency of the teacher candidates in bilingual education was motivated by the need to obtain as accurate a picture as possible of their command of a standard Spanish dialect. As mentioned earlier, the native speakers of Spanish usually do not have a great deal of experience in using this language for too many purposes outside the home. Yet most of the materials being used for the Spanish portion of bilingual education programs in Texas use a standard dialect of this language. Therefore, the decision was made to use a Northern Mexican standard dialect for the test, since this language variety enjoys a certain popularity in Texas as evidenced by television, radio, newspapers and a significant portion of the Mexican American population. On the other side of the coin, non-native speakers of Spanish in our program usually had far less exposure to this language than their native counterparts. Thus, for advising purposes we had to obtain a more accurate idea of how well the teacher candidate functioned in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing a standard Spanish dialect.

Our objectives for a diagnostic language assessment instrument were to develop a procedure to do the following:

1. To determine the future teachers' control of the four language skills in an objective manner.
2. To assess the future teachers' control of certain phonological, grammatical and lexical items representative of a standard dialect.
3. To be able to recommend the courses necessary to overcome any weaknesses.
4. To document the linguistic growth of the future teachers as a result of their university training.
5. To make this assessment in a relatively reasonable period of time.

The original test developed is currently undergoing modification as a result of our pilot-testing last summer and fall. I would like to discuss some of the features of the original exam, some of the results of our pilot-testing, and , finally, what has been modified and the rationale for modification.

Description of Test

The original test consists of five parts: an oral interview, a listening comprehension section, a second speaking section, and reading and writing sections.

Oral Interview

The oral interview consists of five levels of increasing difficulty and is designed to give individual students the opportunity of demonstrating their range of Spanish-language abilities. The

interviewer makes an effort to put the students at ease and engages them in discussing topics which should be of interest. There is no attempt to trick the students by leading them to make errors, since the objective is to guide the students through gradual stages of difficulty until they reach their maximum level of oral language proficiency. The oral interview provides for flexibility of content and students thus have the opportunity of expressing their interests and demonstrating their abilities. For example, the interviewer begins with some of the following topics at Level I: Where the students are from; What their hometown is like; What their daily routine is like; What their immediate plans are. Students are assigned to Level I if their speech demonstrates some of the following characteristics:

- Handle verb morphology for simple present, past and the periphrastic future, but with frequent errors, particularly with irregular forms and unfamiliar verbs.
- Vocabulary limited to the most familiar topics as indicated previously.
- Bothersome pronunciation, but intelligible with some effort to someone used to dealing with non-natives.
- Fluency characterized by frequent hesitations and groping for words.

Some of the possible topics at Level II are as follows: To relate some stories or events in the past, such as how the students became interested in a career in education; some embarrassing or humorous event; how and why they came to UT Austin; role play introductions;

jobs they have worked at. Students are assigned to Level II proficiency according to these criteria:

- In terms of grammar, they handle verb morphology for simple present, past and periphrastic future with considerable accuracy, although they may still have difficulty in differentiating between the preterit and imperfect tenses, have limited control of the subjunctive; have difficulty with such things as por vs. para, ser vs. estar, etc.
- Their vocabulary allows them to handle with confidence, but not with great facility social situations, including introductions and casual conversations.
- Their pronunciation is faulty, but intelligible to most native speakers.
- Their fluency is characterized by an ability to sustain a conversation with circumlocutions and frequent pauses.

I will skip Level III because of time constraints and briefly describe Level IV. It should be noted that the interviewer does not have to include each level before proceeding to the next level of difficulty. If a student demonstrates no problems at Level II, for instance, the interviewer can go directly to Level IV. However, if this level proves too difficult for the student, the interviewer has the option of using Level III. Topics for dicsussion at Level IV might include such things as issues in the profession; detailed descriptions of objects, for example, a car, an article of clothing, an appliance; opinions about social and political issues. Students are assigned to Level IV if their speech shows some of these traits:

- Rarely make grammatical mistakes.
- Can participate in any conversation within the range of their experience with great precision of vocabulary.

- Do not have bothersome phonological errors.
- Are native speakers or closely approximate the fluency of native speakers of Spanish.

Students are assigned to Level V if their proficiency is native and it surpasses that of a Level IV rating. Thus students are rated separately on their control of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall fluency. A student might receive a rating of 4 on grammar, 3.5 on vocabulary, 5 on pronunciation and 5 on fluency for a total score of 4.37 on the oral interview.

Speaking

Although the oral interview is a speaking test, too, the speaking section allows us to assess the students' oral control of certain verb forms within a meaningful context. Since the Spanish verb system is highly inflected, it was felt that a separate section on verb morphology was warranted. The speaking test is accompanied by an audio tape and a picture booklet. The tape provides the student with instructions and the verbal stimuli to accompany the visual stimuli. The technique was borrowed from the Peace Corps in its Spanish-language program.[5] The procedure consists of using a series of stories told in English by voice on the tape and accompanied by pictorial representations. After the students have listened to the entire story in English, they are instructed to turn off recorder A, which has the stimuli, and turn on recorder B, on which they record the same story in Spanish. They are allowed to follow the pictures and are instructed to tell the story as nearly like the English

version as possible. For example, in one of the stories the students are told that Juan Pérez is someone whom the author knew at some time in the past and that the events of the story took place at some time in the past. The students are, thus, expected to generate the proper forms of the preterit or the imperfect. Part of the story is as follows:

> "Juan Pérez is a doctor who lives on the Avenue of the Americas. He is married and has five children. On a certain day Juan woke up at 6:00 AM, but he was still tired and went back to sleep. He slept until 7:00. He got up at 7.00 and went into the bathroom, but there was no hot water. He didn't like to bathe in cold water, so he went to the kitchen to heat some water. He returned to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. When the water was hot, he took it to the bathroom and began to bathe. While he was bathing, his wife was preparing breakfast." etc.

The story continues and guides the students to use both simple and compound tenses in the past. Although the emphasis is definitely on verb morphology, this section is morphosyntactic in nature since it requires the students to use the verb forms within syntactically correct sentences. In order to focus on verb morphology, rather than vocabulary, it should be noted that the test booklet indicates the infinitive form of each verb the student is expected to use.

Listening Comprehension

The original listening comprehension section consisted of four parts:

> Part A--The students heard a one-line stimulus, such as ¿Cómo estás?, and they selected one of four written multiple choice answers.

Part B--The students heard a series of short dialogs of approximately four lines each and for each dialog they answered on paper one multiple choice question.

Part C--This part consisted of four longer dialogs which were more advanced in content and dealt with such topics as women's lib, preparing for a trip, etc. Each dialog had several multiple choice questions.

Part D--This part consisted of two dialogs, each 3-5 minutes in length. The dialogs were followed by a series of statements to which the students were to respond to with a True of False answer on paper.

The modification of the listening comprehension portion as well as other parts of the exam will be discussed shortly. It should be mentioned that the speakers for the recordings of these tapes were either Mexican Americans or individuals from Northern Mexico. Student reaction to their speech was generally positive in that students indicated that the speakers' pronunciation was natural and not "fancy" or artificial.

Reading

Originally this part consisted of four reading selections with five multiple choice questions each. This type of test item is common to many standardized foreign language tests, including the previously mentioned MLA Spanish Exam and such well-known tests as the Pimsleur Modern Foreign-Language Proficiency Tests.[6] The four reading selections were on contemporary topics and were chosen on the basis of their potential interest to students, such as certain facets of Chicano participation in our society, a Peace Corps volunteers' first impression of his host country, etc.

Writing

This section posed certain problems. The notion of a short written composition was abandoned because of the subjective nature of its evaluation. Yet as David P. Harris indicates in Testing English as a Second Language, writing is a complex skill and it consists of at least five general components: content, form, grammar, style, and mechanics.[7] Is writing the ability to generate and commit to paper a series of connected thoughts expressed in a grammatically correct framework? If so, the oral interview gives students the opportunity to demonstrate this ability and the written section might not provide any significant information other than spelling ability. The original version of the test, therefore, included the following:

- A section on prepositions requiring the students to fill in the blanks.
- Two paragraphs using the cloze technique.
- A taped dictation.

It was felt that these procedures would give us some indication of the students' command of the writing skill in Spanish within certain controlled situations.

Results of the Pilot-Testing

The test was used on an experimental basis during summer and fall with both undergraduate and graduate students. The following are some of the results:

TABLE I

Percentage Mean Scores: Total Population

Oral Interview	Oral Prod.	List. Comp.			Writing					Reading	
		Easy	Mid.	Diff.	Prep.	Verbs	Cloze 1	Cloze 2	Dic.	Easy	Diff.
5	98.5	92.5	95.5	96.3	85	85	85	76	90.5	97.5	75
4	96.6	89.4	88.2	92.9	78.7	78	70.6	55.6	88.8	88.4	63.2
3	91.8	85.8	86.5	89.6	71.6	76.3	60.5	49.7	86.8	90.8	60.8
2	81.5	90.0	88.0	93.0	63.3	72	42	42.7	84	96.7	80

TABLE 2

Percentage Mean Scores:
By Native Language Background

Oral Interview	Oral Prod.	List. Comp.			Writing					Reading	
		Easy	Mid	Diff.	Prep.	Verbs	Cloze 1	Cloze 2	Dic.	Easy	Diff.
5(Native)	98.5	92.5	95.5	96.3	85	85	85	76	90.5	97.5	75
4(Native)	97.3	89.4	88.2	92.9	78.8	78.6	72.3	54.7	88.7	87.8	61.7
4(Non-Nat)	85				78	68	40	72	91	100	90
3(Native)	91.9	83	86.5	89.6	71.4	74.4	59.9	47.6	85.7	95	70
3(Non-Nat)	91.5	100	86.5	89.5	72.5	86	63.5	60	92.5	90	59
2(Native)		100	82	95	61	60	40	20	77	100	90
2(Non-Nat)	81.5	85	91	92	64.5	78	43	54	87.5	95	75

Tables 1 and 2, on the handout, summarize the results of the testing thus far. The extreme left-hand column gives the oral interview scores, which we would expect to predict overall oral proficiency in Spanish. A score of 5 represents skills equivalent to those of an educated adult speaker of standard Spanish. The lower this score, the lower the proficiency. Of the 38 persons in our sample, four were placed in the highest level (5) on the oral interview proficiency scale. The next level (4) included 19 persons, the following one (3) had 12, and the last one (2) had 2 persons. Of the entire group, only five are non-native speakers of Spanish, one of whom scored at level 4, and two each at levels 3 and 2. All the scores other than the interview level are in percentages (% correct).

We would expect to find that the interview levels would correlate positively with at least the oral production and listening comprehension scores. In fact, this positive correlation is evident for all sub-tests with only two exceptions. The level 2 scores on the listening comprehension and reading tests are at least higher then the level 3 scores, and in one instance are higher than level 5 and in three others higher than level 4. It is not entirely clear why this is so, although native language background may be a possible explanation. Of the three persons in level 2, two are non-native speakers of Spanish. It seems plausible that the listening skills of these individuals would surpass their oral production skills, given the nature of the foreign language instruction offered in the schools. For example, high school foreign language classes may have an

opportunity to listen to generous amounts of material, but time for individual oral production practice may be limited.

If we consider Table 2, which presents the scores by level and by native-language background, we notice that the natives as a group scored higher on the oral production sub-test than the non-natives, whereas the reverse is true in the dictation exercise. In addition, the natives' levels on the oral interview correlate positively with every sub-test except the reading test. There are only two exceptions, both in the listening comprehension test and both involving the same level 2 native. Of course we would not necessarily expect a positive correlation with the reading test. For the non-native speakers, there are no clear trends in the correlations between interview levels and the other sub-tests.

Modification of the Test

You may be wondering about the length of the original test. It was felt that the test was over-ambitious since it required approximately four hours to administer! In our zeal to obtain as much information as possible about the students' linguistic abilities, we included entirely too many test items. Some of the literature on oral language assessment for young children recommends a short test.[8] The same general principle should apply to older students. Thus, the modifications now under way will produce an instrument approximately two hours in length. More specifically, the oral interview has been reduced from 25 minutes to fifteen. The speaking portion was originally

conceived to be 30 minutes in length, but in reality it took 1 hour. This has been shortened to 30 minutes. The listening section has been reduced to 20 minutes. The original reading portion consisted of four reading selections and this has been reduced to two selections since the first two were quite easy and did not discriminate between low and high achieving students. Finally, the writing section now consists of a dictation and a new multiple-choice section on structure. While having students actually produce a piece of writing on assigned topics may be worthwhile, the time required for evaluation would be overwhelming. Thus, we opted for the technique of testing for structure as suggested by David P. Harris.[9] The total writing section now takes approximately 40 minutes.

Future Plans

Our future plans call for standardization of this instrument for use with our students. In addition, students will eventually take the multiple-choice sections on IBM answer sheets to facilitate the scoring procedure. If we have an entry diagnostic instrument, logically we should have an exit test to measure the students' progress and acquisition of specialized vocabulary necessary for the bilingual education classroom. During the 1976-77 academic year, we will hopefully begin the development of such an instrument. Our intent, then, is to determine the Spanish-language abilities of our students so that the teacher-preparation program can carefully direct students into courses and activities that increase their command of

this language. Our ultimate goal is to provide local schools with teachers who are completely fluent in both English and Spanish in an effort to implement quality bilingual education programs.

FOOTNOTES

1. U.S, Documents, Federal Register. (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 1975), pp. 2843-2844.

2. Center for Applied Linguistics, Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Bilingual-Bicultural Education. (Arlington, VA: 1975), pp. 2-3.

3. Modern Language Association, MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Tests, Spanish. (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1963).

4. College Entrance Examination Board. CEEB Spanish Proficiency Exam. (Princeton: Educational Testing Service), revised annually.

5. The oral interview section was based on an unpublished informal test developed by the Peace Corps Training Staff in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in 1970, for use by the Peace Corps.

6. Pimsleur Modern Foreign-Language Proficiency Tests. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1967).

7. David P. Harris,'Testing English as a Second Language. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969), pp.68-80.

8. Betty J. Mace and Joseph H. Matluck, "Language Characteristics of Mexican American Children: Implications for Assessment." Jour. of School Psychology, Special Issue: Assessing Minority Group Children. Vol. 11, no. 4, 1973. pp. 365-386.

9. Harris, op.cit.